

5 Trends Transforming the End-to-End Customer Experience

Why Trust, Social Responsibility and Digital-First Technology are Redefining How Enterprises Interact with Customers

FOREWORD

Conversations Without Limits

Customers' expectations are changing faster than ever and will only continue to evolve. There are now more communication channels than ever – SMS, in-app messaging, WhatsApp and more – where customers want to interact. And, there is more pressure from C-suites to accelerate digital transformation initiatives in an effort to keep up with the pace of change. While this can feel like a tall order for enterprises, we are in no way limited in how we can tackle this changing landscape head-on.

In today's always-on, digital-first era, enterprises have an unprecedented number of resources at their fingertips. Whether it's the prevalence of sophisticated cloud technology ecosystems or customers' increasing preference for digital-first interactions, the opportunity is endless.

It's often easy to focus on the limits we face, especially when it comes to restrictions placed on how we can (or cannot) engage with our colleagues and customers. My challenge for all of us as we move forward is to focus on where opportunity lies and how we can be faster, smarter and more innovative. Whether it's how we collaborate across business units or how we engage with customers, it's time to think without limits. Thanks to the progress we've seen across people, process and technology, we have a unique opportunity today to create meaningful, memorable experiences with customers at every point of interaction – experiences that make or break customer loyalty.

Going forward, we need to embrace conversations without limits.

Gone are the days of one-way, transactional messages. Today, customers expect personalized, two-way conversations – something we can only achieve with sophisticated technology. Solutions that are purpose-built for the cloud enable enterprises to be more agile and efficient – ultimately giving customers the interactive, empathetic experience they have come to expect. And, as customers' needs and businesses' priorities change over time, pure-cloud technologies equip enterprises to evolve and scale for the future.

In 5 Trends Transforming the End-to-End Customer Experience, Smart Communications collected insight from industry thought leaders to uncover the major trends that will impact businesses in the months and years to come. Contributors include:

Mark Bernhardt

Managing Director, Australia & New Zealand, nCino

Kelli Bravo,

VP, Healthcare and Life Sciences, Pegasystems

Christina Colby

Chief Customer Officer, Guidewire

Subra Ghantasala

Senior Vice President Financial Services and Insurance, NTT DATA

Tim Hays

CIO, Mountain West Farm Bureau Mutual Insurance & 360 Insurance

Rahim Kaba

VP Product Marketing, OneSpan

Marci Maddox

Research Director, Digital Experience Strategies, IDC

Will Morgan

Senior Research Analyst, Aspire

Sanjeev Sawai

Chief Innovation Officer, HealthEdge

Gabe Smith

CCXP, Content Manager & Associate Director, CXPA

Tony Spensieri

VP and GM, Enterprise Financial Services and Insurance, DocuSign

Simon Tindal

Chief Technology Officer, Smart Communications

Dr. Jose Quesada MD, MBA,

Managing Director, Cloud & Digital Salesforce, PwC

Jeff Winter

CMO, Duck Creek

Each of these individuals offers a distinct perspective on how we can deliver a new level of customer experiences. We are at a unique moment in time where businesses can make the investments and adopt processes that will launch them on a path to creating meaningful, impactful customer success for years to come. I hope you join me in having customer conversations without limits.

James Brown

CEO, Smart Communications

The 5 Key Trends Transforming the End-to-End Customer Experience Are:

TREND 1

Enterprises Will Double Down on Building and Nurturing Trust With Customers

TREND 2

Customers Expect to Be Guided Through Experiences

TREND 3

Enterprises Will Need To Focus on Future-Proofing Their Businesses

TREND 4

Customers Increasingly Expect Businesses to Prioritize Social Responsibility

TREND 5

A Digital-First Mindset Underlies Transformation

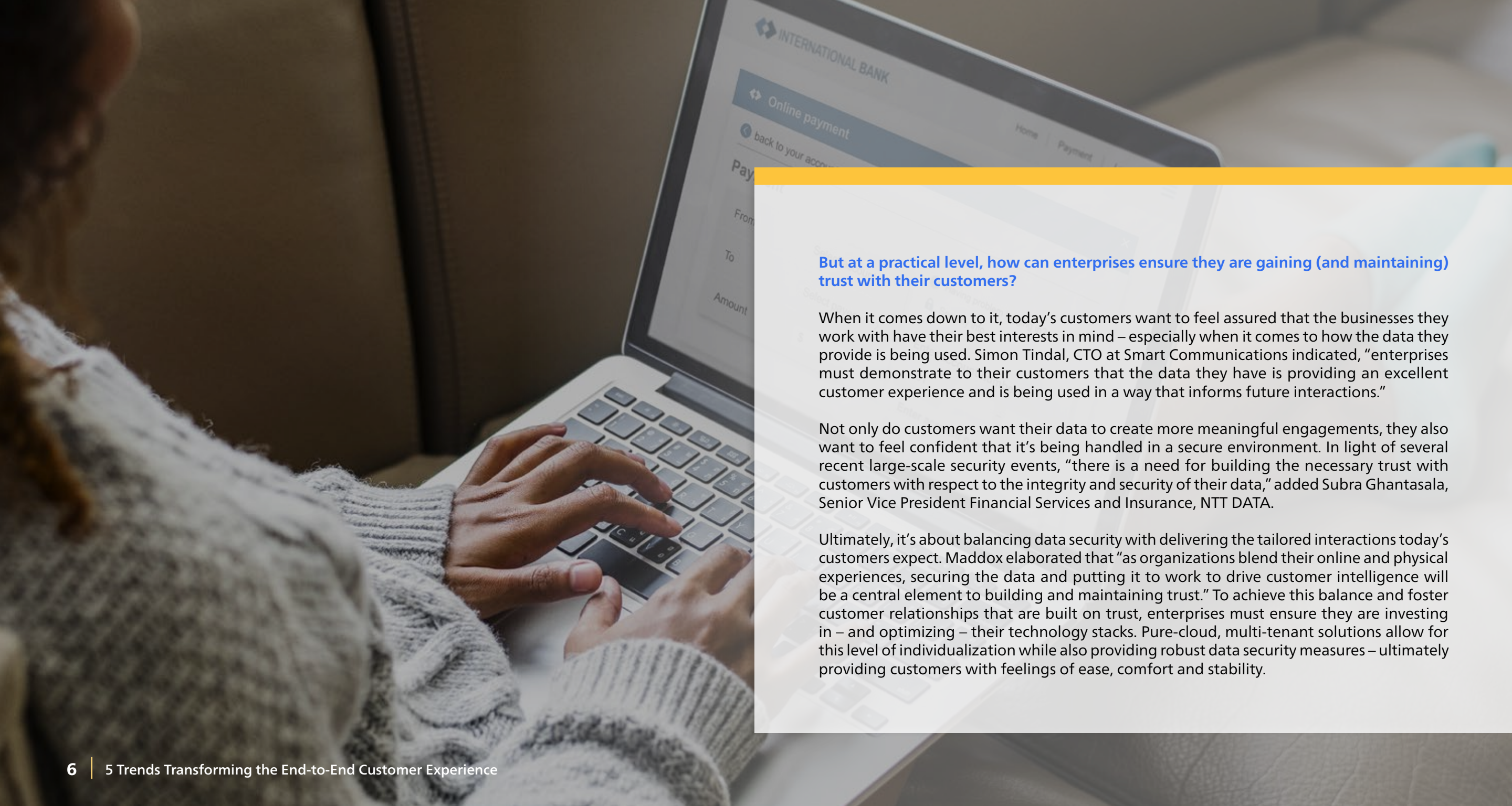


TREND 1

Enterprises Will Double Down on Building and Nurturing Trust With Customers

The ongoing pandemic, data security concerns, supply chain disruptions and more are creating high levels of stress and uncertainty for today's customers. This is making it more important than ever for enterprises to instill a sense of trust and find new ways to support their customers. Unfortunately, while a majority of businesses across the insurance, financial services and healthcare industries believe they have leveraged communications to build trust throughout the pandemic, only around a quarter of consumers indicated that communications have made them trust companies more.¹

For this reason, customer trust is becoming an increasingly important metric to measure, as Marci Maddox, Research Director, Digital Experience Strategies at IDC, pointed out "IDC predicts by 2025, 35% of organizations will replace Net Promoter Score-like metrics with Trust Indices in RFPs to align traditional security and risk solutions with customer success, brand and reputation."



But at a practical level, how can enterprises ensure they are gaining (and maintaining) trust with their customers?

When it comes down to it, today's customers want to feel assured that the businesses they work with have their best interests in mind – especially when it comes to how the data they provide is being used. Simon Tindal, CTO at Smart Communications indicated, “enterprises must demonstrate to their customers that the data they have is providing an excellent customer experience and is being used in a way that informs future interactions.”

Not only do customers want their data to create more meaningful engagements, they also want to feel confident that it's being handled in a secure environment. In light of several recent large-scale security events, “there is a need for building the necessary trust with customers with respect to the integrity and security of their data,” added Subra Ghantasala, Senior Vice President Financial Services and Insurance, NTT DATA.

Ultimately, it's about balancing data security with delivering the tailored interactions today's customers expect. Maddox elaborated that “as organizations blend their online and physical experiences, securing the data and putting it to work to drive customer intelligence will be a central element to building and maintaining trust.” To achieve this balance and foster customer relationships that are built on trust, enterprises must ensure they are investing in – and optimizing – their technology stacks. Pure-cloud, multi-tenant solutions allow for this level of individualization while also providing robust data security measures – ultimately providing customers with feelings of ease, comfort and stability.

Additional Insights from Industry Experts



Insurance

“For hundreds of years, customers have expected events in their lives that require insurance claims to be handled expeditiously, equitably and efficiently.

Insurers must focus on digitizing the customer experience to enhance the quality of customer conversations, and ensure they continue to build and maintain trust. Today, customer trust requires a sophisticated, and complete, technology stack.”

– Tim Hays, CIO, Mountain West Farm Bureau Mutual Insurance & 360 Insurance



Financial Services

“Opening an account requires mutual trust between a consumer and a financial institution (FI). As more consumers turn to digital channels to open accounts, the risk of digital fraud increases. FIs need to ensure they know exactly who they are interacting with before onboarding the customer. This is where e-signatures, paired with strong identity proofing capabilities, have become a key requirement to protect account opening agreements – especially in a remote setting.”

– Rahim Kaba, VP Product Marketing, OneSpan



Healthcare

“If you truly believe someone knows you, you trust them. Asking patients or members to repeat personal information across forms, for example, weakens the level of trust they have placed in a provider or plan. The burden should not be placed on the end customer to share things they have already provided. Sophisticated technology improves work, collaboration and most importantly, care.”

– Kelli Bravo, VP, Healthcare and Life Science, Pegasystems

TREND 2

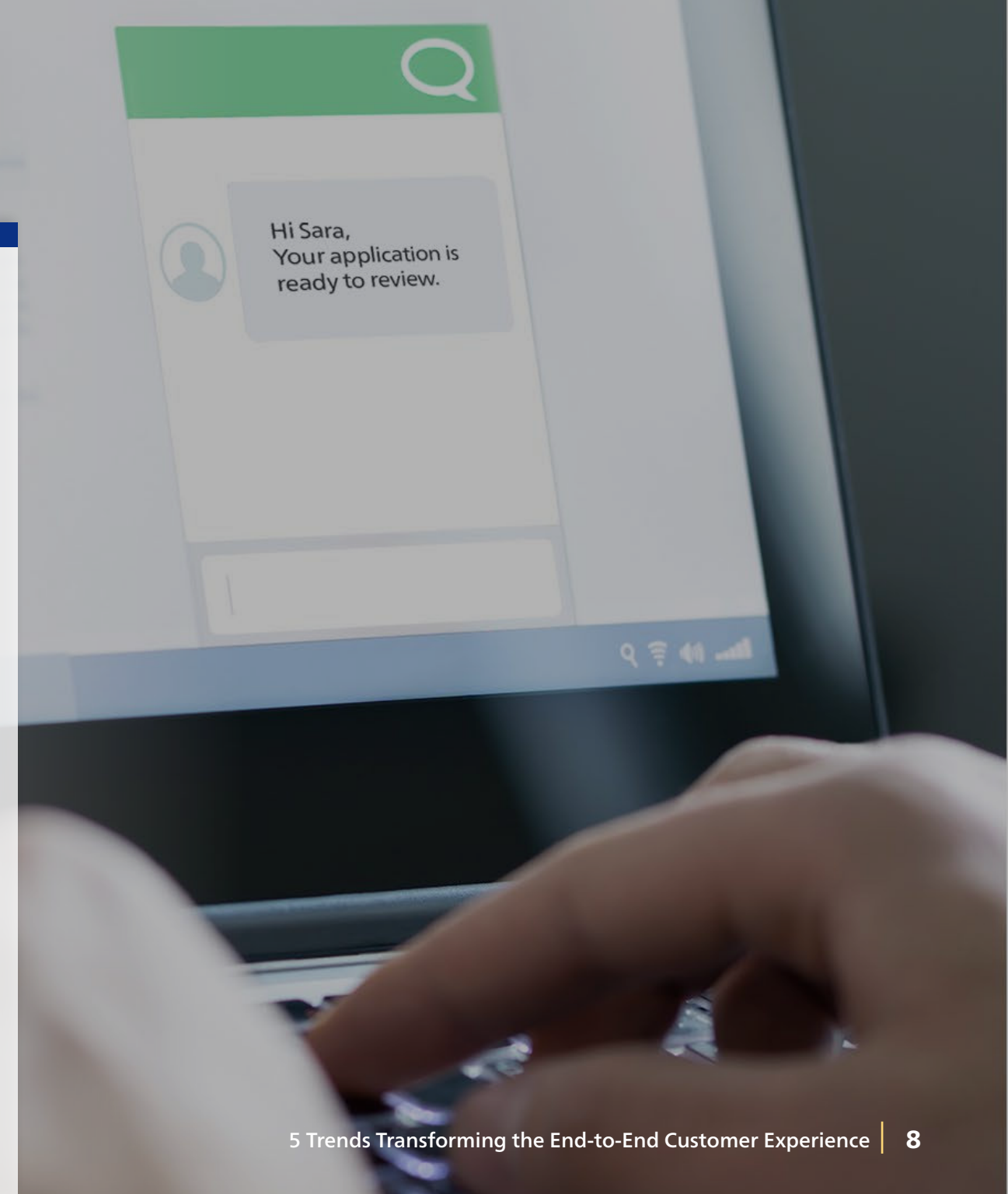
Customers Expect to Be Guided Through Experiences


Customers today overwhelmingly prefer and expect digital-first interactions. In a world where everyone is always on the go and as technology becomes smarter, faster and more intuitive, the ease and efficiency digital experiences offer can't be beat.

Unfortunately, while customers overwhelmingly prefer digital, business' adoption of the technologies that power these self-guided interactions lags. "While digital adoption has exploded, digital communications today do not embrace the true interaction these consumers expect or that advanced platforms make possible," added Will Morgan, Senior Research Analyst at Aspire. "The enterprises who focus on unlocking the potential for meaningful interaction through their digital communications will be the best positioned to boost customer loyalty, improve retention and maximize customer lifetime value."

Going forward, being "digitally available" isn't enough. Instead, enterprises need to focus on tailoring individual interactions to provide a superior, end-to-end customer experience while also automating processes that allow customers to self-guide where possible. Tim Hays, CIO, Mountain West Farm Bureau Mutual Insurance & 360 Insurance, reminds us, "companies are not compared by their customers to their competitors – they are compared to their customer's last best digital experience."

"Businesses can provide a superior experience through personalization of content, recommendations and predicting customer needs," said Sanjeev Sawai, Chief Innovation Officer at HealthEdge. He continued, "it's important to monitor behavior of consumers to continuously improve digital experiences and provide meaningful, effective outcomes."



A man in a blue suit and white shirt is looking down at a smartphone he is holding in his hands. The background is a blurred city street with buildings and other people.

Informing future interactions based on previous behaviors is a key factor in building loyalty and requires enterprises to tap into customer data. There is a fine line between welcomed personalization and going too far, however. Christina Colby, Chief Customer Officer at Guidewire, reminds us, “don’t be creepy! Make sure you aren’t overwhelming customers – give them options and the independence to self-guide through important decisions.”

To avoid the creep factor, it’s key to “create experiences around a customer’s channel of choice and automate processes,” continued Colby. Remember that today, enterprises can’t make assumptions based on demographic data alone – what works for one person won’t necessarily be as helpful for the next. Smart Communications’ Tindal added, “we can’t put people in boxes anymore. You have to use the data you have on individual customers and be agile and flexible when their preferences shift.”

Enterprises must ensure they are ultimately facilitating what their customers are trying to achieve through self-guided, “no touch” processes. Tony Spensieri, VP and GM, Enterprise Financial Services and Insurance at DocuSign, highlighted several ways to facilitate this, including, “straight through processing to avoid human error, automated workflows and modernizing back-office functions.”

At the end of the day, it’s important to identify certain processes that can be optimized quickly to provide near-immediate results. Look for processes where all parties (both enterprise and customer) will benefit and begin automating where possible. Businesses that prioritize automating the end-to-end customer experience to provide personalized, helpful interactions will be the ones to come out on top.

Additional Insights from Industry Experts



Insurance

“Insurance companies need to focus on customer retention and as a result, they must invest in a personalized and empathetic customer experience. Empathy will continue to be especially important in the insurance world.”

– Subra Ghantasala, Senior Vice President
Financial Services and Insurance, NTT DATA



Financial Services

“FIs need to move away from manual processes, where possible. For example, traditional forms need to become tailored interviews that lead to a unique customer experience. To achieve this level of modernization, FIs need to honestly assess the strengths and weaknesses of their current tech stack and integrations.”

– Tony Spensieri, VP and GM, Enterprise Financial
Services and Insurance at DocuSign



Healthcare

“Market forces – and consumer behaviors in particular – are starting to move the needle in healthcare and put increased pressure on providers. Amazon, Walmart, CVS, Walgreens and the broader adoption of telehealth, where experiences are fully digital, should drive traditional providers to move quickly.”

– Dr. Jose Quesada, MD, MBA, Managing
Director, Cloud & Digital Salesforce, PwC



TREND 3

Enterprises Will Need To Focus on Future-Proofing Their Businesses

Businesses today are facing disruptions on all fronts, whether it's an up-and-coming competitor, postal service delays or changing regulatory requirements. In addition to these macro-level forces, businesses also don't know what channels will pop up in the next several years that are going to become critical to the customer experience. Ultimately, it's clearer than ever that enterprises need to future-proof for whatever could be next.

Overwhelmingly, the thought leaders interviewed for this white paper identified three key areas where enterprises should focus their efforts: digital business acceleration, de-silo critical business functions and technology ecosystems and integrations.

Digital Business Acceleration

The global pandemic forced many enterprises to condense multiyear digital transformation strategies into a short timeframe. As the world continues to navigate the pandemic and its implications, enterprises need to examine these processes that they quickly put into place to ensure they are set up for the long term. Smart Communications' Tindal reminded us that "enterprises should refine and tweak these processes to ensure that these new initiatives are secure and built to scale."

As enterprises go through this auditing process, they must also identify new ways to innovate, specifically focusing on empowering employees to innovate faster. Jeff Winter, CMO of Duck Creek, highlighted the importance of "low code and SaaS platforms as the tools that will transform workplaces, given their adaptability and flexibility" – putting the focus on digital first and reducing generational knowledge gaps.

The businesses that don't examine the foundation of their customer-facing processes and take the necessary steps to future-proof their technology stacks "will have no hope in engaging customers in meaningful, bi-directional interactions" in the future, added Aspire's Morgan.



De-Silo Critical Business Functions

Accelerating digital initiatives and preparing for the future are near-impossible if businesses are still relying on manual, outdated processes. As a result, one key area of focus in both the near- and long-term should be breaking down silos between internal business units and stakeholders. DocuSign's Spensieri noted that enterprises should "assess the disruptions of the past several years and determine which were exacerbated by reliance on outdated processes. Businesses that have the ability to shift to accomplish more remotely and in a less manual fashion will be better positioned to weather future disruptions."

Technology Ecosystems and Integrations

All too often, businesses rely on "a labyrinth of outdated legacy systems, fragmented IT and sub-optimized workflows," which "wastes capital, employee potential and consumer good will," shared Aspire's Morgan. He continued, "under these conditions, it can be exceptionally difficult to cobble together a strategy, establish a single view of the customer, develop a comprehensive voice or settle on cohesive messaging."

It's critical to remember that it is impossible – and not sustainable – for enterprises to figure out how to modernize their technology stacks and better future-proof their businesses on their own. Technology ecosystems are the foundation of success and it's impossible to thrive without alliances, open platforms, migrations, integrations and more.

At the core of any successful technology implementation is the people and processes behind it. No matter what, the customer experience must be front and center. Gabe Smith, CCXP, Content Manager & Associate Director at CXPA, added, "while there is no single tool or approach that organizations can adopt to fully anticipate every challenge the future may bring, a customer experience focus that is supported by leadership and delivered in all corners of the company can ensure continued business success, even in uncertain times."

The most effective way enterprises can future-proof their businesses is to invest in and prioritize technology solutions that evolve and scale as customer expectations change over time. Internal buy-in coupled with sophisticated tech stacks will ensure businesses are always delivering on what customers want and expect.

Additional Insights from Industry Experts



Insurance

“During the COVID-19 pandemic, carriers that were in the cloud and leveraging the power of SaaS were better prepared to navigate uncertainties. Going forward, insurers need to continue to build resilience digitally. Start small, solve for specific problems and begin to integrate digital solutions to strengthen your foundation.”

– Jeff Winter, CMO, Duck Creek



Financial Services

“Digital-first doesn’t mean digital-only. Research has shown that as activities get more complex, consumers tend to turn to channels where they can get human help. As more consumers rely on a hybrid of face-to-face and digital interactions with advisors or agents, omnichannel experiences that combine e-signature with videoconferencing, for example, banks can recreate the power of traditional interactions in a virtual environment.”

– Rahim Kaba, VP Product Marketing, OneSpan



Healthcare

“The healthcare industry must explore new and innovative ways to collaborate. Remote patient care – or even just the ability to access a patient’s record and drive them to better health outcomes – is only possible through sophisticated technology. This will ensure ‘whole person care’ as we move forward.”

– Kelli Bravo, VP, Healthcare and Life Sciences, Pegasystems



TREND 4

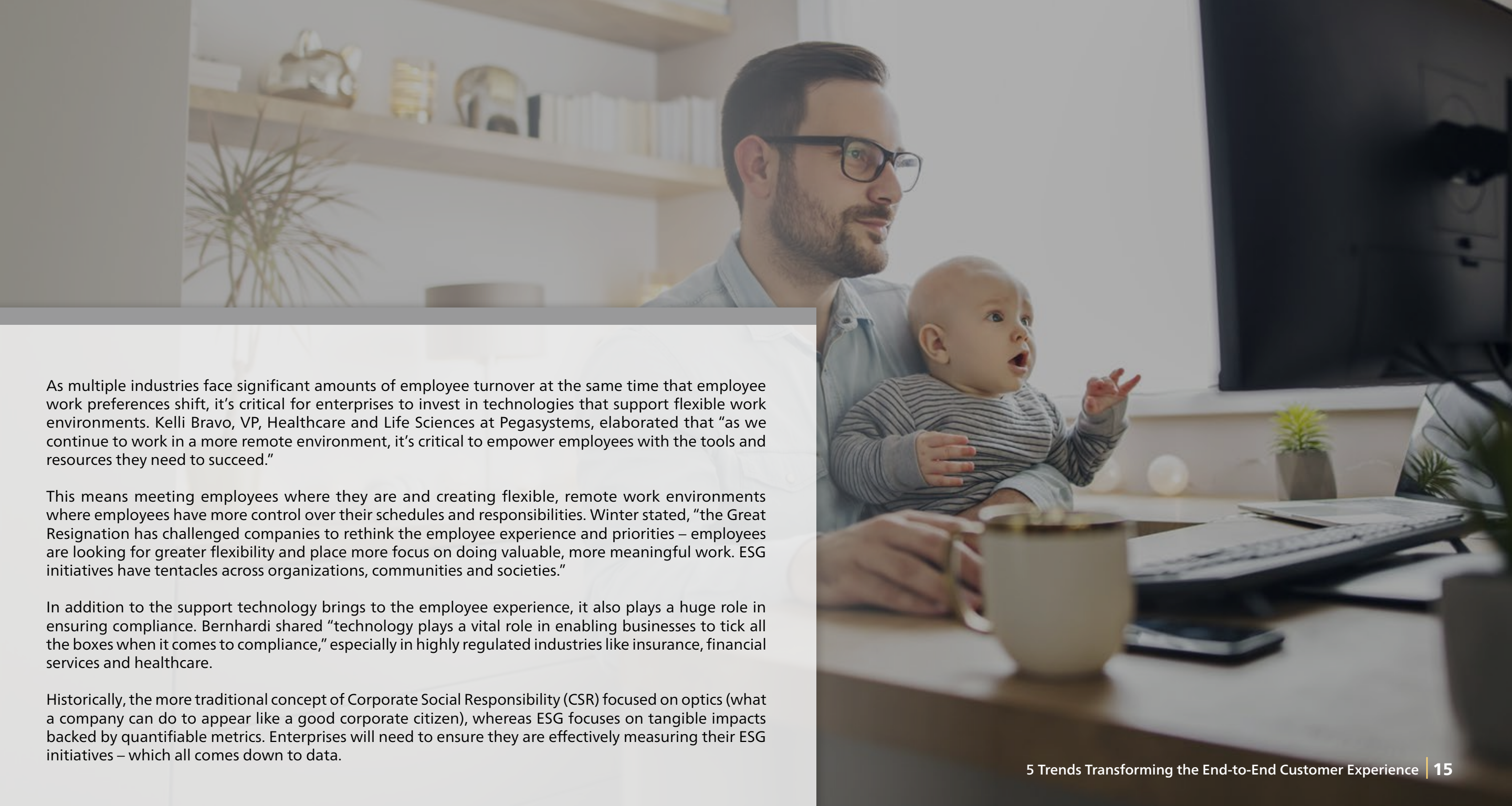
Customers Increasingly Expect Businesses to Prioritize Social Responsibility

Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) is becoming an increasingly important factor for customers, employees, shareholders and investors. In research conducted by Smart Communications, nearly one-third of consumers indicated they preferred digital interactions because they are more sustainable.² It's clear that the tides are turning as businesses around the world assess how to translate ESG goals into measurable and beneficial efforts.

Mark Bernhardt, Managing Director, Australia & New Zealand at nCino, shared that "ESG is transforming how organizations measure success and how they engage customers and shareholders. The inherent complexity and global scale of ESG requires businesses to develop strong and collaborative global partnerships. Those who do are best positioned to respond quickly and effectively."

When it comes to managing this level of complexity, Winter of Duck Creek emphasized the importance of ecosystems "comprised of innovators, software providers, consultants and more who share the responsibility of being a core part of our customers' desire to adopt evergreen solutions."

To move forward with ESG in mind, enterprises must focus on both employees and technology, especially as it relates to diversifying the workforce and ensuring compliance.



As multiple industries face significant amounts of employee turnover at the same time that employee work preferences shift, it's critical for enterprises to invest in technologies that support flexible work environments. Kelli Bravo, VP, Healthcare and Life Sciences at Pegasystems, elaborated that "as we continue to work in a more remote environment, it's critical to empower employees with the tools and resources they need to succeed."

This means meeting employees where they are and creating flexible, remote work environments where employees have more control over their schedules and responsibilities. Winter stated, "the Great Resignation has challenged companies to rethink the employee experience and priorities – employees are looking for greater flexibility and place more focus on doing valuable, more meaningful work. ESG initiatives have tentacles across organizations, communities and societies."

In addition to the support technology brings to the employee experience, it also plays a huge role in ensuring compliance. Bernhardt shared "technology plays a vital role in enabling businesses to tick all the boxes when it comes to compliance," especially in highly regulated industries like insurance, financial services and healthcare.

Historically, the more traditional concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) focused on optics (what a company can do to appear like a good corporate citizen), whereas ESG focuses on tangible impacts backed by quantifiable metrics. Enterprises will need to ensure they are effectively measuring their ESG initiatives – which all comes down to data.

Additional Insights from Industry Experts



Insurance

“Every organization has a responsibility to live up to promises they’ve made, which is especially true in insurance. With an increased focus from both governments and consumers around ESG initiatives, insurers need to transform with exceptional analytics, relationally focused and experience driven digital technology.”

– Tim Hays, CIO, Mountain West Farm Bureau Mutual Insurance & 360 Insurance



Financial Services

“FIs of all sizes need to prioritize sustainability in both their business operations and the products and services they offer. They should find ways to reduce unnecessary paper and travel, while exploring new offerings like sustainability-linked incentives, green home improvement loans and ESG-focused investments. To ignore the importance of ESG initiatives exposes businesses to reputational, transactional and regulatory risk.”

– Tony Spensieri, VP and GM, Enterprise Financial Services and Insurance, DocuSign



Healthcare

“While healthcare payers and providers may have their own corporate-driven ESG initiatives, the industry at large is looking to connect ESG to improving health outcomes. Payers and providers are leveraging cloud solutions to address social determinants of health, facilitate access to care, shift to value-based care models and minimize fraud, waste and abuse.”

– Dr. Jose Quesada, MD, MBA, Managing Director, Cloud & Digital Salesforce, PwC



TREND 5

A Digital-First Mindset Underlies Transformation

It's clear that given current trends, the only way to truly succeed moving forward is to adopt a digital-first approach. For businesses that already have begun their digital journeys, it's important to continue to evolve and create more sophisticated digital experiences – maturing and scaling over time.

A successful digital-first approach must be customer-centered. Guidewire's Colby reminds us that as "businesses interact with customers across channels, they must remember to provide the experience customers want, not what the company wants them to have."

This is where enterprises need to shift from isolated, disjointed transactions to continuous, omnichannel conversations. Effective omnichannel orchestration enables organizations to add digital channels to their print efforts, automate common customer interactions, effectively promote two-way conversations and more. With two-way messaging across multiple digital channels, businesses can strategically orchestrate conversations across the end-to-end customer experience, ensuring that approved, compliant communications are delivered in real time and initiated when the customer demands it.

As part of these continuous conversations, enterprises must leverage known information about their customers to convey empathy. As customers are now more willing to share information to have a better product and experience, there is a huge opportunity to build loyalty and strengthen personalization. However, this requires a balance where the digital and the 'analog' must work together.



The best way to deliver these customer-centered experiences is to leverage data well. “Enterprises have massive amounts of digital information at their fingertips and need to use the data to develop deeper, more connected experiences,” added nCino’s Bernhardt. “Continuing to adapt with quick technology upgrades will allow institutions to remain competitive and customer-focused. Businesses must remain agile to survive.”

As a note of caution, however, enterprises cannot underestimate the risk that cybersecurity poses. Mitigating these risks comes down to choosing to partner with the right vendors with the right credentials. Smart Communications’ Tindal elaborated that “strong cybersecurity is a main driver moving many leading businesses to choose SaaS solutions. Multitenant solutions ensure all users are on the latest version, whereas managed services require updates across hundreds of environments.”

Ultimately, an amazing customer experience requires people, processes and technology. “Taking care of people – employees and customers – focusing on agile processes and decision making and investing in integrated technology solutions will allow organizations to thrive in a rapidly changing world,” concluded HealthEdge’s Sawai.

Additional Insights from Industry Experts



Insurance

“Insurers are rapidly incorporating strategies to deliver personalized, frictionless, on-demand digital service. They are incorporating these key capabilities into their customer engagement processes, which is a byproduct of a broader digital-first strategy. The greatest opportunity for insurers lies in this transformation – shifting to providing hyper-personalization of products and services and meeting customers where they are with a prescribed recommendation of the insurance product best suited for their needs.”

Christina Colby, Chief Customer Officer, Guidewire



Financial Services

“The biggest risk to FIs? Failure to innovate. Army General Eric Shinseki said ‘if you don’t like change, you’re going to like irrelevance even less.’ FIs have been traditionally slow to embrace change, but the uprising of nonbank fintech entities is disrupting the balance in the Financial Services industry.”

– Tony Spensieri, VP and GM, Enterprise Financial Services and Insurance, DocuSign



Healthcare

“We’re living in a very connected world and unfortunately healthcare is behind other industries when it comes to digital adoption. Right now, it’s difficult for patients, providers and payers as most processes are still paper-based. Automation, analytics and moving from legacy systems to pure-cloud solutions will allow those in the healthcare industry to be smarter and more efficient.”

- Dr. Jose Quesada, MD, MBA, Managing Director, Cloud & Digital Salesforce, PwC

Conclusion & Next Steps

The way businesses interact with their customers – or more specifically, customer conversations – are the thread that weaves through all of the key trends defining the year ahead. It's more important than ever to know customers on an individual level and interact with them on their terms and based on their preferences. This ultimately leads to a better customer experience, competitive differentiation and a positive impact on financial performance.

Prioritizing digital-first, omnichannel customer experiences enables enterprises to shift from static, one-way communications to two-way conversations. A cloud-first, end-to-end solution like the Smart Communications Conversation Cloud™, gives businesses complete control over the customer experience, plus the ability to scale. By taking the incremental steps to improve the customer experience via better communications, businesses will see the needle move when it comes to brand loyalty and customer trust.

After reading through these key trends, we hope you feel inspired to deliver conversations without limits.

To learn more, visit
www.smartcommunications.com

The Conversation Cloud™



About Smart Communications

Smart Communications is a leading technology company focused on helping businesses engage in more meaningful customer conversations. Its Conversation Cloud™ platform uniquely delivers personalized, omnichannel conversations across the entire customer experience, empowering companies to succeed in today's digital-focused, customer-driven world while also simplifying processes and operating more efficiently. Smart Communications is headquartered in the UK and serves more than 650 customers from offices located across North America, Europe, and Asia Pacific. Smart Communications' Conversation Cloud platform includes the enterprise-scale customer communications management (CCM) power of SmartCOMM™, forms transformation capabilities made possible by SmartIQ™ and the trade documentation expertise of SmartDX™. In 2021, the company acquired Assentis, a leading European software solutions provider specializing in customer communications management (CCM) with a focus on the financial services industry. To learn more, visit [smartcommunications.com](https://www.smartcommunications.com)

References:

1,2 <https://www.smartcommunications.com/benchmark-study/>

SMART
COMMUNICATIONS™



www.smartcommunications.com



[/company/smart-communications./](https://www.linkedin.com/company/smart-communications/)



[@CCMInnovators](https://twitter.com/CCMInnovators)